

June 1993

approach

The Naval Aviation Safety Review



I Can Save It—Pg. 2

Hero or Bum—Pg. 6

The Complete Preflight—Pg. 23



See, I Told You

Can you find the powerlines and towers?* This photo was taken at less than one-half mile, at the same time of day, from where the wire-strike occurred. The afternoon sun made the wires invisible from this angle.

I've written two editorials about the folly of those who stretch rules or take unneeded risks when they fly. During the following event the aircrew thought they did everything right...but they still had a mishap.

The crew briefed the low-level mission. They talked about altitudes, airspeeds and obstructions, including powerlines and towers. The BN had a current chart with all obstruction markings and updates.

The crew checked the ADB and found no discrepancies with any safety of flight equipment. They thought they were prepared for the mission. But a hazard waited for this crew, hidden by the afternoon sun. Powerlines.

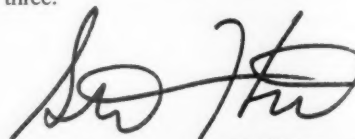
Visibility on the route was unrestricted. As they neared the towers, the route turned them into the sun, which made the wires between those towers virtually invisible. The crew knew they were in the vicinity of powerlines and were looking for them. Although the route had an approved minimum altitude of 200 feet AGL, they were flying between 400 and 440 feet AGL.

To the right and slightly above the aircraft a flash caught the pilot's eye. As he banked to the left, he saw the wires hit the right wing. The wing cut two 3/8-inch static lines suspended 432 feet above the ground. The rest of the aircraft missed the lower 345,000-volt wires by approximately 40 feet. The damage to the aircraft was minimal. The leading-edge slats on the right wing were gouged but the aircraft was flyable.

Who would you blame for this mishap? Was it just dumb luck that they hit the smaller static lines (instead of the high-voltage wires)? Or did the crew's planning and skills save them? Although the aircrew is responsible for avoiding obstructions — visible or not, charted or not — I find it hard to fault these aviators.

The aircrew did not consider the poor visibility caused by the afternoon sun. Can you say that you would have thought of it? Even the most experienced crew may miss some contingency. If this crew hadn't planned the hop so thoroughly, they might have hit the high-voltage wires instead.

Flight planning, experience and discipline are the primary tools of safe flying. We all have these abilities in different degrees. Those with less experience use planning and discipline to compensate. Experienced aviators must fight the urge to depend on their experience to compensate for poor planning or poor discipline. The best aviators use all three.



Lt. Steven Halsted

**The right-side tower is just above the lower clearing and to the left of the upper clearing. The wires and the left side tower are invisible.*

inside approach

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DEPARTMENTS

Bravo Zulu 26 Vultures' Row IBC

On the cover: An F/A-18C of VFA-87 prepares to launch from USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN71). Photo by Lt. Mike Hadden.

Ed. Correction: Re: "That's Why It's Called Survival Gear!" (Mar '93) — The leg restraint system in the F/A-18 is a two point connection designed to be attached just above the knee and above the boot. The pilot wore the upper restraint properly, but the lower restraint incorrectly just below the knee.

Note to subscribers: We combined the April and May issues of *Approach* into a single issue, published last month; if you have a one-year commercial subscription, you will receive 11 issues instead of 12.

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For Lack of a Brief and a Gunner's Belt

By Lt. Elisa A. Raney

Emergent tasking had come up during the day: a night vertrep with the receiving ship coming alongside. We got an overhead time, and agreed on a man-up time. Although I was a recently designated HAC, I was to be the copilot on this flight. The aircraft commander had a reputation of being a good stick and had just gone over 1,000 hours in the H-46.

When I arrived on the flight deck, he told me that the preflight had already been completed. Our customer had not yet come alongside, so we spent time checking out the staged loads. It looked to be a short flight, only 10-15 lifts.

As the receiving ship came into view, we manned up. The HAC told me that he had already briefed the crewmen, so he and I briefed in the cockpit. Although we used the NATOPS pocket checklist, we didn't discuss emergency procedures. All emergencies were to be handled "in accordance with NATOPS". I knew this was not a proper brief, but let it go.

The flight was "routine" for about 30 minutes.

Our customer had broken away and was about 500 yards to starboard. I had the picks from the left seat, and after picking up load No.12, the HAC called out, "Good gauges, pulling 82 percent torque."

No problem there. As we transitioned clear of the ship, he took the controls. I glanced over toward the receiving ship, just as the HAC said that we were drooping. I immediately looked at our triple tach and saw both Nf needles and Nr pointing at 88 percent. We sure were drooping! I said that we should pickle the load, while automatically depressing the engine beep-trim switches to max on both engines.

The HAC responded, "I think I can save it", which made no sense to me.

"I'm not going in the water with the load still attached," I replied. "Pickle, pickle, pickle!"

I started and selected the APU, and heard our crew chief tell our second crewman to use the emergency release. I heard a metallic thud as the hook released our load and the "routine" portion of the flight fell away.

As the HAC began a right turn back toward our ship,

our crew chief yelled that we had an engine on fire. Immediately looking at the fire T-handles, I saw neither was illuminated. He continued calling, "Fire, fire, the No.2 engine is on fire!" Now the No.2 T-handle was illuminated. I pulled it and activated both agent-discharge switches. Our crew chief said we were still on fire and asked about the agent switches. I double-checked that both were displaced. I saw the No.2 engine gauges wind down, and noted 600 feet on the radar altimeter.

The HAC made a mayday, single-engine call. From the tower, our OIC called for us to dump fuel. I hit both fuel dumps, and saw our ship to starboard through the HAC's chin bubble. I knew we would have to set up for the approach, and immediately the HAC called that we had just lost the No.1 engine. Dual-engine failure! Almost

instantaneously, both generators dropped off line, taking the cockpit lighting and automatic flight control stability with them. I crossed over the APU, and we regained lighting and AFCS.

As we fell out of the night sky, I called 100 feet on the radar altimeter. As the needle passed 50 feet, I jettisoned my door. The last thing I saw before impact was my door falling away. My sensation was that of the console slamming into my face. My inertial reel had apparently failed. I saw a flash of light, was underwater immediately, and could feel the aircraft rolling left, to my side.

I felt the aircraft shudder violently, which I took to be the rotors still trying to turn underwater. The phrase "until all violent motion stops" flashed through my mind. I knew my door was gone and had, or thought I had, my door frame for reference. I released my harness and felt myself move across the cockpit, up and away from my exit. I kept pulling, reaching and pulling, but could not find my exit. I thought about using my HEEDS bottle but did not want to let go with one hand, knowing my door was gone. After an eternity I was out, feeling nothing around me but water.

When I reached the surface, I saw the HAC about 30 feet in front of me, already with his strobe light flashing

The HAC responded, "I think I can save it", which made no sense to me.

and attached to his helmet. Our crewchief was next to me. He and the HAC set off pencil flares. My leg had been hurt, so I was no help to them. We called and looked for our second crewman. We never found him. Rescue boats had been launched and recovered the three of us within 30 minutes.

From the time the HAC called drooping until we hit the water was no more than two minutes. It was not until we were in the motor whaleboat that the HAC mentioned having armed the emergency throttle in flight. The emergency throttle system bypasses the engine fuel control and allows the pilots to manually control fuel flow to the engines.

The first engine to fail exploded; witnesses on the ship described a fireball coming out from the side of the aircraft. Our crew chief said we had debris flying all over the aft cabin area. The prevailing theory as to why our second engine failed is that the emergency throttle was armed while I was on the beeps. Normally the beep trim switches control positioning of the engine condition actuators. Arming throttle, however, transfers beep function to control the emergency throttle actuators. The beep trim switches then directly control fuel flow to the engine. Depressing the beep trim switches to maximum with the emergency throttle armed will cause the engine to overspeed and be shut down by the fuel-control governor.

After realizing a droop, I automatically went for the beeps, given that with a 2-percent droop, the engines would already be at topping. I was on the beeps only six seconds, calling as I beeped, but the HAC didn't hear or acknowledge this call.

There were several things we could have done, all falling under the heading of crew coordination. To brief that "all emergencies will be handled in accordance with NATOPS" and leave it at that was unacceptable. If the HAC had given a thorough brief, he would have covered how power-loss situations would be handled.

He had been taught to use the throttle in loss-of-power situations, while I was safety wired to using the beeps first, and throttle only as called for in an emergency procedure. Neither of us violated the letter of NATOPS, but we failed to coordinate our actions as a team in flight. He did his thing and I did mine, each oblivious to the other half of the cockpit.

The next discrepancy was the Nr readings. The HAC called drooping, but did not say by how much. Later he said he saw 98 percent Nr, nothing lower. When I scanned the triple tach, my gauge showed us at 88 percent. I did not call this reading out because once the HAC called the droop, I assumed that he also saw 88 percent Nr. We both should have included the numbers when we tried to tell each other that something was going wrong.

One of the basic elements of effective communication is to ensure your message has been heard and understood. As obvious as this may seem, in this instance, it could have changed the last 90 seconds of our flight. I remember being told back in flight school that whenever one pilot pushes a button or flips a switch in the cockpit, he should let the other pilot know. The HAC never called "arming emergency throttle," nor stated his intentions in the brief. I never confirmed that the HAC knew I was on the beep trim switches. Again, a major breakdown in aircrew coordination.

We lost someone that night. At the time of impact, our second crewman was kneeling on the cabin floor next

to our crewchief, on one knee, looking forward into the cockpit. We do not know if he was on a gunner's belt or not. He felt that if he went down in an H-46 strapped in a seat, the nylon would

As we fell out of the night sky, I called 100 feet on the radar altimeter.

probably give way on impact, leaving him trapped in the seat. Before our mishap, the OIC had put a message on the "All Read" board, stating that aircrewmembers will be strapped in a seat at all times, unless up and about for security checks. It is quite possible that if our second crewman been strapped in, he would be alive today.

Don't plan for an emergency, but have an emergency plan. Having thought out night-ditching scenarios over and over again gave me something of an advantage that night. CH-46D NATOPS ditching procedures are not specific about when to jettison doors—pre- or post-impact. Jettisoning my door before impact was a decision I had made before this flight. Because the helo rolled to my side, the door could have been difficult to release underwater. Having done "blind" APU-start procedures numerous times before, I was confident I could find the switches in a dark cockpit.

Lt. Raney flew with HC-8. She is currently assigned to the Navy Postgraduate School.



I Spin Training!

By Lt. Michael Perkins

Our squadron was preparing to change home ports and this hop would be one of our last chances to fly from our beloved Miramar. We climbed into the beautiful southern California sky, and after the standard acro, G-pulling and high-speed stuff, we ran a cold intercept on an unknown bogey.

We slowed to join up on what ironically turned out to be a Japanese P-3. Our airspeed was about 220 as we exchanged bows and smiles, and each said, "Konichi wa." We wanted to impress our future neighbors with a quick sayonara. We added power and pulled. Topping off at about 22,000 feet, just above a 2,000-foot-thick layer, our airspeed was now about 180 knots and the gauge was completely out of both our scans. We both picked up a tally at 3 o'clock and eight miles.

A quick hard, rolling pull and... "Hey! What's going on?" The jet snapped violently to the left, flipped over, and immediately entered a nose-low, upright yawing departure to the right.

"How did we get here?" I wondered as time slowed.

Spin arrows up now, a right spin arrow. The last time I saw something like this was in that T-2 spin hop a couple of months ago. I called, "Departure, wait a minute, stick forward, neutral lateral, lock your harness."

My pilot was on his third "What the...!"

"Rudder opposite the turn needle yaw, turn needle's on top, spin arrow to the right," I said. The disorientation from spiraling through the clouds was intense, but with a quick, calm "Roger that," my pilot fed in left rudder and snap, we were flying again. After the standard 17-unit pullout, we checked our gas and went home.

Boldface works. I was pleasantly surprised to hear myself spout off the procedures.

A nose-low spiral in a Tomcat can make you think, "Spin!", your worst nightmare. But the jet recovered nicely, and our airspeed was never below 170 knots.

Scan, scan, scan! And take advantage of the T-2 spin training.

Lt. Perkins is a RIO with VF-21.

The Line Between HERO *and* BUM

By Lt. Matt Bannon

Our section brief included air-intercept control and basic fighter maneuvers in the local warning area. My RIO (an air wing heavy) and I did our pre-start checks, only to discover that his mask wasn't working. We called the PRs to bring out a new mask. The RIO couldn't hear his own transmissions very well, consequently he was hot mike the whole time. His breathing didn't bother me that much.

We took the runway as Dash 2, for a flight-leader separation takeoff. We joined up and flew to the warning area.

Once cleared to maneuver, I broke away from lead after he kissed me off, simultaneously adding MIL power. Within a second or two we heard a loud bang. Sucking the throttles to idle I looked down at the engine instruments; the left indicated 30 percent rpm! TIT and fuel flow pegged! Normally, unless the pilot has gooned

it away, TF-30 compressor stalls clear after bringing the throttles to idle. But when I saw RPM that low...

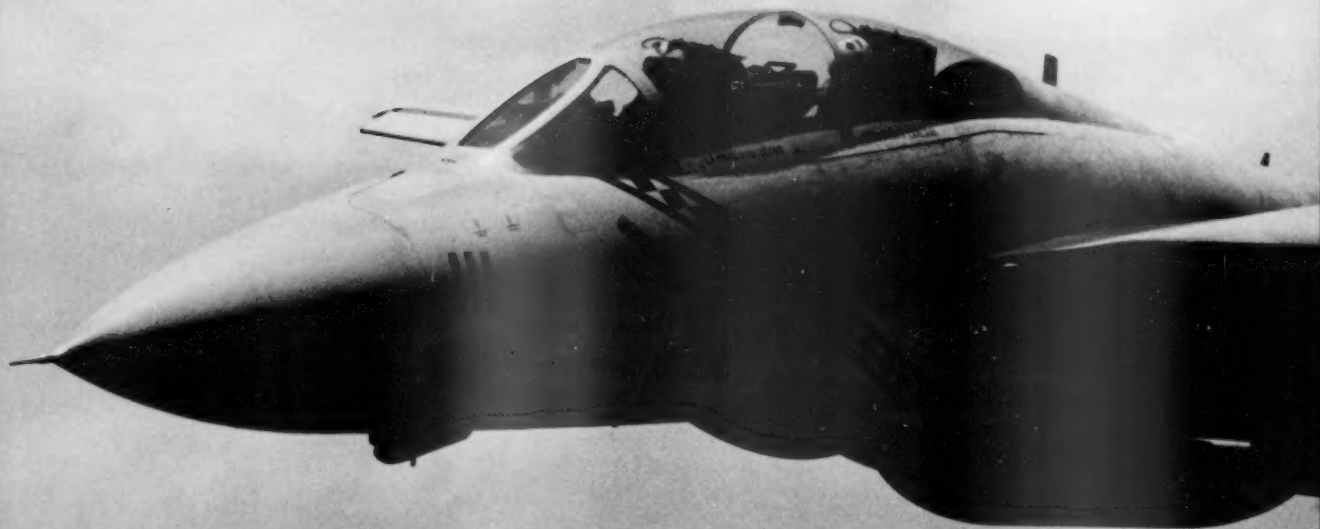
"I'm shutting it down!" I told my RIO and lead, who was still close aboard.

"Wait, not yet!" was the emphatic plea from the lead who had seen the flames shooting from our tailpipe, indicating what he thought was a compressor stall. No sooner had the throttle hit the back stop when I said incredulously, "I've got a fire light!"

I reached for the fuel shut-off handle. Pulling back on the stick to slow down, I pushed the fire-extinguishing button. OK, one potato, two potato... uh-oh. I've never stared at something so intensely.

Forcing himself to remain calm, lead said, "Yeah, you're on fire."

My mind raced to the last step for "fire in flight": if fire persists, eject. While turning back toward home base



and telling the RIO to break out the book, I cinched down my lap belts and wondered what IROK stood for.

"Chubby, is it a 'big' fire, or 'little' fire?" I asked my lead in a voice two octaves higher than normal.

"It's smokin' pretty good, and we see some flames. Switch Base in the front-seat radio." Good call. The squadron's going to want a piece of this one.

My RIO told the controller we were switching Tower.

"Tower, 207, emergency. We're on fire. Request immediate arrested landing, crash crew, and LSO on station."

OK, some people say an in-flight fire is one of the most serious emergencies one can encounter; enter problem No. 2.

"I'm showing a compressor-stall light on my other engine."

"How are your instruments?" lead asked.

"RPM, good. TIT good. Fuel flow zero.

Two out of three, not bad. Must be an indicator problem." We might be trailing a little smoke and flames, but we are still flying.

With the sun at my six o'clock and 30 degrees high, it was hard to see if the fire light was still on. Consequently, I had to shield it with my hand. Finally, my RIO called, "Our fire light is out."

"You're smoking a lot less now," my lead reassured us.

Our communication had been exceptionally concise up to this point. Unfortunately, my RIO couldn't hear the lead aircraft, and consequently talked over his transmissions. Combine this with a steady fire light, and a few stall aural tones thrown in for good measure, and I was beginning to become overloaded. I did ask my RIO to read me the steps for engine fire, only to notice that I'd forgotten to turn air source to off. How did I forget that?

We reviewed the procedures for a single-engine approach, and as a precaution, combined-hydraulic failure procedures, even though the bidirectional pump had picked up the load.

"Dump is on," I told my RIO, wondering how much of the 18,000 pounds of gas we could get rid of.

Coming down hill, we were still getting compressor stall warnings and noticed that any time the airspeed got above 320 KIAS, the aircraft would shudder abruptly.

Twelve miles, still over water, we prepared for a normal dirty-up. When the flaps came down, the fire light came back on. Only later did our wingman tell us that an explosion had blown panels off the aft section of the jet. The cause was most likely the different air loads gener-

ated by the aux flaps and the fire, which had never been extinguished.

I always said it in the trainers, but this time I meant it:

"If I say the three magic words, I'll race you for the handle." Four miles. "Start it down," a familiar CAG paddles voice told me.

Three miles. The nagging thought of how close I was to stepping over the line between hero and bum was

reinforced when I noticed how many houses were below us.

"Tomcat, ball, 7.0," my RIO said, as I watched my lead taking a cut-away.

"A little power."

Oh yeah, I still needed to catch the wire.

We felt the familiar tug on the plane, and shut it down after we came to a stop. Only after climbing out of the jet did I realize the full extent of damage.

We had experienced a turbine failure that had thrown compressor blades through the engine and skin for 360 degrees along the longitudinal axis. Fire had ravaged the port engine nacelle, burning through the aluminum, and blowing off panels. The engine had also seized, explaining why the aircraft shuddered above 320 knots.

After our trip to medical to give blood and other body fluids to the doc as our punishment, I began to review what we had done. First, I never said anything to my RIO about his mask not working properly. It came

back to haunt us when the snakes started to appear.

Second, I had forgotten a boldface step. NATOPS says, "Throttles...idle. Air source...off" when you get a fire light. Since the throttles had already been off when the fire light came on, I inadvertently skipped the step and continued with the subsequent steps of climbing and decelerating, and depressing the button for the fire extinguisher. It taught us the value of going over the steps we thought we had already done.

Third, and most important, are wingman responsibilities. Dash 2 is either going to be no help, a hinderance, or your ace in the hole. Luckily for us, our wingman was the latter. On several occasions, he mentioned items to consider before they occurred to us. He also gave us a "warm fuzzy" on the status of the fire, thereby enabling us to stay with the jet rather than ejecting.

We were lucky that day; it could have just as easily turned out differently. Thanks to a cooperating jet, and excellent mutual support, we came out on top.

Lt. Bannon is an F-14 pilot with VF-33.

**"If I
say the
three
magic
words,
I'll
race
you
for the
handle."**



The EMCON Game

Cdr. John Leenhouts

By Lt. Robert C. Ryan III

On our first day of EMCON operations in the Gulf, the weather was hazy and the sea was calm. We planned a strike to a nearby island. CVIC re-briefed our route and gave us a review of EMCON procedures and current frequencies (recently changed because of repairs on the ship's radios.)

As we walked to our jets, my lead observed, "This is going to be a piece of cake." Just before we climbed the ladder, the maintenance control chief ran up with a message from the ready room with a change in recovery freqs.

Both launch and strike went as planned. We picked up our holding instructions from the E-2 and proceeded to the fix. We figured we would cross the ramp just at ramp fuel. My lead broke, I broke and followed him on downwind.

As I rolled into the groove I saw that the cables weren't retracting. The waveoff lights flashed and away I went (state 3.1).

"No problem," I thought, "I'm actually doing better on fuel than I originally thought." Just to play it safe, I called for priority on tower frequency, with no response. I tried the original tower frequency. Again, no response. I rolled into the groove and this time a Prowler was stuck in the gear. Once again, the lights came on and I went around (state 2.7).

On the back radio, my lead said with concern, "Try approach freq and look for a tanker."

I tried every frequency on the card of the day. On one of the frequencies I hear, "Test 1, 2, 3, 3, 2, 1." I quickly keyed the mike.

"This is aircraft 305. Can anyone hear me?" Nothing. I turned downwind and called Tower.

"Hornet abeam, state 2.2," I said, thinking that tower might just be up. Before I even reached the 45, the waveoff lights lit up again; the Prowler was still in the gear (state 2.0). Now I had reached barricade fuel and the closest divert was too far.

My lead saw me on the waveoff, realized that I was in serious trouble and shouted over the back radio, "Look for a tanker hawking you!" I didn't see any.

Just as I cleaned up and climbed to tanker altitude (angels 7), Tower, on the original frequency, said, "305 your signal is tank, switch button seven for check in and tanker's angels."

I switched button seven. "305 checking in, declaring an emergency, state 1.8." Radar told me that tanker 704 was four miles, angels seven. I thought for only a second about time versus fuel. "In what direction?" No response. At this point, radar was trying to contact the EMCON tanker unsuccessfully because of the earlier mixup on the frequencies.

Now I had picked up a contact at angels 4 coming my way. I asked again for the tanker's altitude. I'm told angels 7, so I broke lock, swung around the ship again, looking for anything that moves at angels 7 (state 1.6).

"305 switch up tanker common for 705," chirped Radar.

"Negative 305. Stay up this freq. We'll get you tanked." The voice could only have been the captain's.

In what seemed forever and 200 pounds more fuel, the tanker popped up behind me at angels 5. My lead, still listening to all of this on the flight deck, spotted the tanker, and told me its position on the back radio.

I made a quick 360-degree descending turn to roll out in a tight trail. I plugged 12 seconds later (state 1.4).

It is never one big event that creates a crisis, but usually many small problems conspiring against you. If something doesn't sound right in the "big plan," even if it seems minor, change it or it will come back to haunt you.

After the first pass I should have been up on guard calling in the blind my position and fuel state, instead of jumping from button to button. That probably would have saved me from eating humble pie instead of "a piece of cake."

Lt. Ryan flies F/A-18Cs with VFA-146.

How Much Gas Do We Have?

Lt. Paul Lumsden

In these lean times, you've got to take advantage of every good deal that comes along. My squadron was going through an airframe modification program that required our Prowlers to be flown to the Grumman facility in Florida, one at a time, and then picked up at a later date when the work was completed.

The pilot originally scheduled for this delivery called in med down the night before because he said his head felt "as big as a pumpkin." So, without much reservation, I volunteered in the 11th hour to take the trip.

The plan was simple. One of our veteran ECMOs and I would fly the jet down there with two reservists in back. They would fly their squadron's jet that was ready for pickup home with us in back. Our partners were experienced aviators with several thousands of hours in various types of tactical aircraft between them.

The trip down went smoothly. The next morning, we swapped jets and after a short delay for fuel, we were ready to fly home. With our fuel load, configuration, and forecasted winds in mind, it looked like we could barely make it back to Whidbey in just two legs. That's no small accomplishment for the Prowler, going from one corner of the country to the other. At this point, big question marks should have started floating around. In fact, I remember mumbling something about our unlikely chances of making two legs.

The weather at our stopover was clear, however, and we had a plan if it looked like we couldn't make it. Besides, the pilot for our return flight had thousands of hours flying 747s for an air freight company in addition to all his Prowler hours. So, who was I to argue with all that experience?

A few hours later, we passed over Offut AFB with exactly as much fuel as we had planned. We had agreed that if we had any less than this amount, then we would simply land at Offut to refuel.

Although we had already climbed to escape stronger than predicted headwinds, our fuel flow was lower so I still had a warm and fuzzy feeling.

Sitting in back, trying to avoid death by boredom, my squadronmate and I listened with one ear as every so often the frontseaters discussed fuel flow, and estimated fuel on deck. About 150nm out, I heard the pilot say, "I'm looking at 2.3." We both assumed he was referring to how much fuel we would have on deck. Even so, this amount was definitely on the low side, but the weather was clear and I didn't expect any delays.

I finally realized my misinterpretation when during our idle descent from the ionosphere, the frontseaters requested a runway change to allow us a straight-in approach.

The pilot also announced, "For your information in back, we have 1,500 pounds of fuel remaining." We looked at each other wondering what happened to our fuel. Luckily, we got the straight-in and landed.

Even though we shut down with about 1,100 pounds of fuel indicated, there was no discussion or questions about what had just happened. I am sure, though, that everyone thought we had pushed that fuel envelope too far.

The Block 86 digital fuel gauge has been the subject of some concern about its accuracy. Depending on who you talk to, it could indicate in error of 800 pounds or more. You don't have to be a math major to figure out what could have happened. What if our gear hadn't come down? What if we couldn't get the straight-in? What if something had closed the runway? We had backed ourselves into a corner that we were lucky to get out of!

I also can't believe how quickly news travels. Our final leg to Whidbey was fine, but imagine my surprise when the first time I saw the XO after our return, he immediately asked me, "Do you want to tell me how much fuel you guys landed with?"

Lt. Lumsden flies with VAQ-137.



By Lt. Steven Halsted

Fire in the Pits!

The ground shook as the aircraft rolled down the taxiway. Even with hearing protection, the fuel-pit crew could hear and feel the Intruder's powerful engines. In the cool tropical night several men in blue coveralls and plastic helmets and goggles scurried into position.

One of the plane captains drew horizontal lines in the blackness with lighted wands beckoning the aircraft into the fuel pit. Shadows shifted as the airplane's position lights bathed the scene in alternating pale green and red glow. The pilot obediently followed the PC's directions to park his aircraft.

In the jumbled shadows, the barely discernible shapes of the fuel-pit crew moved purposely around the aircraft. An eager young plane captain quickly dragged the heavy fuel hose to the side of the idling aircraft. He lifted and pushed the collar toward the fuel receptacle and attempted to attach it to the aircraft. He was unable to connect it. Several other PCs also tried unsuccessfully to attach the hose.

The night-shift supervisor had just finished another refueling and came over to help. He connected the hose, but was unable to get it to seat. The fit was awkward, almost as if it had been cross-threaded. He continued to try to connect the hose.

Inside the aircraft, the pilot and BN prepared the aircraft for refueling. Since the PC was under the aircraft out of sight of the crew, they weren't aware of any problems. The pit operator saw that the supervising PC had apparently connected the hose. Although he received no signal, he turned the valve to send fuel to the aircraft at over 50 psi. The hose jumped as the pressurized fuel rushed toward the aircraft.

When the fuel reached the receptacle, it sprayed like water from a poorly connected garden hose. The PC was instantly covered with fuel. The violent jerk knocked the collar loose and the hose fell to the ground. Almost 50 gallons of JP-5 quickly spread under the aircraft. Several other crewman were also soaked with fuel.

A PC who saw the hose disconnect yelled, "Fuel!" and urgently waved the others away from the aircraft. The ground crew did not hesitate. They turned and ran to get out from under the aircraft. Dangerous fumes began to rise off the tarmac. Even at idle, the aircraft's jet engines produced a powerful suction in front of each intake. The right intake hungrily sucked the fumes into the engine, which ignited the vaporized fuel.

A fireball engulfed the PC, igniting his fuel-soaked coveralls. He dropped to the ground and rolled, hoping to extinguish the flames. Then realized he was rolling in fuel and the flames were headed toward him. He jumped up and ran toward the next pit.

The pilot had just asked the BN to check the right side of the aircraft to see that the refueling handle was open when he saw a glow under the aircraft.

"We're on fire!" he exclaimed.

He quickly shut down the engines and called, "Canopy." There was no response from the BN. He then pulled the canopy jettison handle. An explosive charge catapulted the canopy into the air behind the aircraft.

The pilot began to get out of the cockpit. He pulled the emergency restraint release handle and tried to stand up. Something was holding him in the seat. He sat down and found that his harness was still attached to the seat. He released the fittings and stood up again.

As he stepped out of the cockpit, he heard an explosion and felt heat on his arm. At first he thought it was the fire from the aircraft, but then he realized that the BN had ejected. The heat from the rocket motor singed him as the seat headed up the rail. He stepped onto the left wing and turned toward the trailing edge of the wing. As he moved down the wing, he slipped and fell to the ground.

The PC was still on fire when someone knocked him down. Another PC grabbed a fire extinguisher, while yet another grabbed a hose and extinguished the PC's burning clothes. They then moved to fight the fire.

When the BN heard the pilot call "Fire!" he looked

out the right side of the aircraft to plan his escape. The fire seemed to make it impossible to climb out. He reached for the ejection handle and pulled. Unfortunately, that choice was wrong. Once airborne, the 12- to 15-knot tailwind combined with his weight and height caused his seat to tumble. The parachute remained in a bundle as the shroud lines tangled around the BN and his seat. He landed 272 feet from the burning plane still strapped into his seat.

More than one bad decision caused this mishap. The squadron continued to use a fuel pit that had defective equipment, even though another squadron had reported the defects and had refused to use the pit. The ground crew was not trained adequately in refueling procedures and there were no squadron instructions to do so. Documentation from the manufacturer of the hose fitting warned against using force to attach the hose. Either everyone ignored that warning or no one knew about it. Finally the pit operator should have waited for the signal from the PC. If he was not completely sure about the signal he should have questioned the procedure.

Forty-five seconds after the fuel ignited, the fire was out, one man was burned over 70 percent of his body and one man was dead.

For another view, see the July/August 1991 issue of Mech magazine.

Lt. Halsted is the editor of Approach.



PH2 Sanner

Good Fortune on a Bad Day

By Lt. Pete Thompson

It was a warm Whidbey day in September, when my regular pilot and I began what could have become the best day of the month. We briefed a single-launch, high-altitude transit to the range, and a low-level to Spokane RBS. With most of the brief completed, we quickly covered the Questions of the Day. The tanker crew breezed through for the cursory brief.

Our brief moved to the bomb-delivery specifics. The pressure was on. We briefed the first run, a straight path, a subsequent general delivery, and follow-on runs for my student pilot.



The mini-tanker would be overhead, waiting for us to take a few plugs for training. The weather? Amazingly CAVU, including the divert fields.

We had the blessings of the gods, or something like that. We walked ahead of time, noticed only minor discrepancies on preflight, had a snappy system alignment and engine startup, and even took off a few minutes early. It seemed that we were exceptionally well-prepared and ahead of schedule.

As we checked in with Boardman, the system steering pointed the wrong way for the target. The usual BN "pucker screwup press the wrong button" phenomenon ate away precious seconds of target acquisition time. But behold—the first and second hits were bullseyes! There was much rejoicing in the cockpit. Freeze data recorded, steering on the target, engine instruments double-checked; I scanned the right side for traffic as we turned in for our third pass.

Then I thought I heard someone mumble, "Not good." "Huh?" I asked, and looked toward my trusty stick pusher. A flashing master caution and two amber somethings glowed on the advisory lights.

"I said, 'This is not good!'" he replied. "We've got zero pressure on both combined hydraulic pumps and a backup hydraulics, and rudder-throw light!"

Our bubble had burst. We considered our options, acknowledging our briefed preference of divert fields: Portland International. As we continued our climbing left turn, I told Boardman we were leaving and switched the IFF and front radio while the pilot told the mini-tanker to join on us. It's a wonder we didn't pile into any one entering or already on the range. The quick adrenaline rush had us pointed in the right directions—up and west—but both of our heads were buried in the cockpit.

The mini-tanker started to join up on our left. I told Center that we had an emergency and would be a flight of two. That's when I saw them shooting past our two o'clock low. I remember thinking that this wasn't what any of us had intended, as I double-checked AFCS off.

Our new wingie was exceptionally good about comm. That was a plus. We covered everything in the PCL before receiving more opinions on the matter. So, we wondered, did ATC say the gear was in battery? We forgot. Yes, sez Mr. ATC, the BAK-114 is in battery, but be sure to remind Tower.

We again wondered, what's a BAK-114? And why should we have to tell Tower? Our wise wingman gave us the clue: BAK-114 is simply a BAK-112 in a slit trench across the runway. We both sighed a little. Good! Besides having told us that there was red stuff coming out of our airplane, the wingman was a priceless source of other wisdom.

When we had worn out the steps, notes and cautions in the PCL, and studied the field diagram, the wingman pimped that it was RTB time unless we really needed the help. A quick glance and we both said, "Naah." I mean, what else could they do, anyway? Naturally, we changed our minds later.

Halfway through the descent at about 30 nm from the field, the dry pumps began to eat themselves with gusto. We stared at the flight-hydraulic gauges and shivered. At about 20 nm, we both noted how cold the water in the Columbia River looked.

Just inside five miles, landing checklist double-checked complete, cleared to land, hand on the hook, I began to worry big time. My pilot was doing his best to keep the wings level. The flight pumps indicated zero with every tiny push of the stick, which he said was feeling "very mushy". I didn't want to know what he meant, so I focused on the runway and pulled the hook handle.

On-speed at about two miles (we had the bonus of operational emergency flaps and slats), we decided on targeting a spot about 1,000 feet short of the gear. It didn't seem prudent to worry about the hook tip at that point. The first tugs of the gear were most reassuring.

Sweaty but safe, engines and pulse rates spooling

down, we sat in contemplative silence while the crash crew hovered around the bird. The canopy wouldn't open by auxiliary; the hydraulic lines must have been empty. Someone discovered how to get the canopy open manually with some help using sign language.

In retrospect, what we learned was significant, despite the good fortune at hand. First, going through the PCL

emergency items before flight is vital. A plan that allows for significant amounts of spontaneity is as bad as no plan.

Next, don't kiss off Dash 2 until you are certain you don't need him. If you consider the facts of this situation, we needed him. What if we had ejected? Without a dedicated SAR base nearby, it could have been a while before we were found, and an on-scene commander could have given precise location information.

The best help is help asked for. I am grateful we had a savvy wingman who knew the difference between help and excess information. Single-



frequency ATC control also helps, if it's available.

Most significantly, know when to eject. Include altitude, attitude and airspeed in your criteria. Just because the airplane is still flying doesn't mean it won't hit the ground fairly soon.

Lt. Thompson flew with VA-52. He is currently an instructor with NROTC Unit at the University of Utah.

The two nuggets preflighted their SH-60B for an out-and-in to Daytona Beach. They would soon deploy in the same det and this flight would be the H2Ps' first together. The senior man had signed for the aircraft and decided that he would fly the right seat on the way down, and his buddy would get the right seat coming home. It was a great chance for these two friends to practice aircrew coordination and build confidence.

The flight from Mayport to Daytona Regional was beautiful. The partly cloudy skies were typical for a summer afternoon; so were the thunderstorms building in the west.

The pilots had conducted a preflight brief, including IMC procedures and vertigo. Halfway home on the return leg, the weather was deteriorating rapidly. They agreed there was no problem, and that it would be a chance to practice IFR procedures and log some actual instrument time. They circled south of the approaching front while filing for and obtaining IFR clearance from the local FSS.

Their clearance originally specified radar vectors back home, and they asked the controller to keep them clear of thunderstorms. ATC gave them a vector and a higher cruise altitude, which was supposed to take them between two "rather nasty cells."

As they flew into the clouds, it was obvious that this was not going to be a drive through the soup. Within a few minutes, they were bouncing around. They asked for a descent.

"Unable to comply," the controller replied. "We have traffic below you."

Soon, the right-seater noticed that his copilot, who had control, was having trouble keeping his airspeed up.

"Man, I'm all over the place," the left-seater remarked, his voice cracking slightly.

"I noticed," replied his friend. "I show you about three degrees nose-up. Bring it down. There ya go. Pippin on the horizon. You got it."

He kept giving the man on his left verbal assistance, occasionally nudging the stick forward to remind him to keep up the airspeed.

What the man in the right seat didn't realize was that

his friend was developing a severe case of vertigo. The PAC asked, "How are you doing?" His copilot replied, "I'm OK. You got it."

Since the left-seater didn't use the word "vertigo," his friend assumed that his scan was just a little rusty. It had been a while since either of them had logged actual instrument time.

After rocking and rolling through the thunderboomers, the left-seater saw a hole in the clouds and canceled his IFR clearance. They descended and landed back home.

The second pilot had realized that he was getting vertigo when they hit the rough stuff. He hadn't followed through on their brief, which had stipulated, "If you get vertigo, confess." When he asked his friend, "How are you doing?" he thought his companion would get the hint and take the controls.

When the right-seater replied, "You got it," his friend thought, "He's got vertigo, too! I'm on my own!"

He felt they were tumbling through the air, but did his best to trust his instruments. Seeing the hole in the clouds let him regain his bearings and the vertigo quickly subsided.

When they discussed the flight, the two young aviators realized that they each had completely different perceptions of what had happened. The left-seater felt as though they had been through a meat grinder, and were lucky to be back home safe and sound. His friend, however, thought that it hadn't been a big deal—a little turbulence combined with rusty airwork.

This situation shows how important it is to fly the brief. If the left-seater had clearly said that he had vertigo, the other man could have taken over and given him a break.

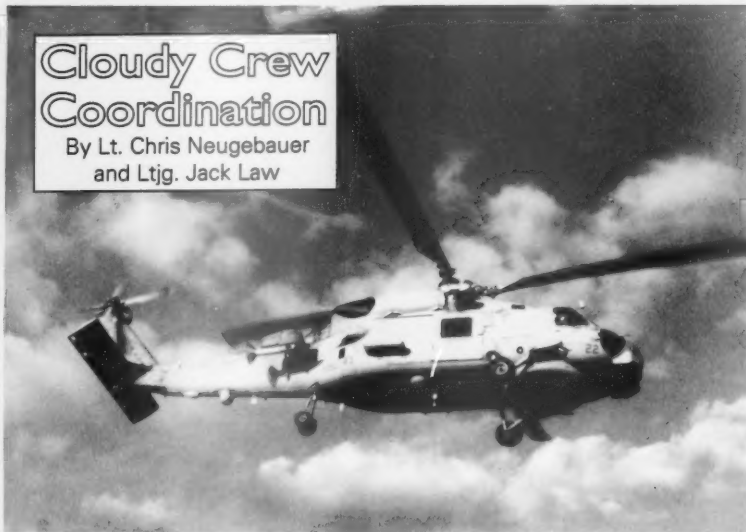
Allowing a pilot suffering from vertigo to remain at the controls not only causes his confusion to grow, but may also result in his errant control inputs giving his copilot vertigo, too.

It's vital to keep a constant flow of information going between the pilots, especially when things get rough. Just like the weather, cloudy communication can make for a rough ride.

Lt. Neugebauer and Ltjg. Law fly SH-60Bs with HSL-42.

Cloudy Crew Coordination

By Lt. Chris Neugebauer
and Ltjg. Jack Law





Robert L. Lawson

No Boredom at Boardman

By Lt. Frank Bijak

We were part of a three plane sortie to Boardman. On our fifth bombing run as we were inbound to the target and in a 45-degree left bank, the aircraft started to roll to the right. Feeling uneasy, I glanced at the annunciator panel and noticed a "backup hyd" light. I looked farther to the left and saw that both flight hydraulic indications read zero, and the combined hydraulic indications were fluctuating between 0—1,000 psi.

A flicker of the rudder-throw light caught my eye. Simultaneously, the pilot said, "Something doesn't feel right."

We started a sluggish right turn out of the range as we stared at the HYD gauges and annunciator panel. I told our flight lead we were on back-up hydraulics, and we were diverting to Yakima, our nearest divert, which had only 7,600 feet of runway and no arresting gear.

All cockpit indications up to this time had pointed to a complete loss of both the flight- and combined-hydraulic systems. The Intruder has an extremely limited back-up hydraulic system, and to date there has been only one successful landing using this system. Finding a divert field was our first concern.

We wasted no time in declaring an emergency and stating our intentions. As we continued our climb, I noticed two more flickers of the "Rud Thro" light, along with the aircraft rolling sluggishly to the right as the pilot tried to keep an easy climb. The combined hydraulic gauges read

between 1,000—2,000 psi. Immediately after the second uncommanded roll my pilot said, "Get ready to get out."

We continued to climb as the aircraft stopped its awkward roll. We experienced one more uncommanded roll to the right as we climbed. As we approached our altitude and heading directly to Yakima, the combined-hydraulic gauges appeared to stabilize near 3,000 psi—full system pressure. The flight hydraulics still read zero and the backup hydraulic light still indicated the loss of only one system. The "Rud Thro" light hadn't been on for several minutes and the aircraft seemed to fly smoothly. We noted our flight lead joining up for support with our divert in sight, some 30 miles to the north.

Taking the hydraulic indications into consideration, we decided to change to our secondary divert to take advantage of a longer runway. We felt confident that the aircraft would fly at least another 10 minutes, given the new hydraulic indications as well as the feel of the aircraft.

We began our visual straight-in with the field in sight. We double-checked all the NATOPS procedures slowly and thoroughly after we had obtained clearance to land with the field some 20 miles away. We made an uneventful landing using aerodynamic braking and rolled to a stop 7,500 feet down the 13,900-foot runway, turning onto the taxiway just before we stopped. We immediately secured the engines and installed the gear pins. ◀

Lt. Bijak is an A-6 BN. He was flying with VA-155 at the time of this story. He is currently assigned to VA-128.

Pull the Tapes!

By AC2 Penny Holt Hadden

Dear Approach,

I've been waiting a long, long time for this! I avidly read each issue to learn more about aircraft emergencies and characteristics. Usually, the stories are very interesting, funny at times and informative.

After being a controller for eight years, I've noticed a trend in the number of authors who blame the controller. We certainly make mistakes, but it isn't the norm in our environment. It is, in fact, highly discouraged. Sometimes we just have so many situations pending that we have to choose priorities: individual pilots cannot see that from their vantage points.

My story is the classic example. The pilot is actually at fault, but once on the ground he's determined to blame the controller.

It was clear and 7 at our NAS. Traffic had begun to pick up, and multiple jet flights were inbound for runway 5 for a GCA. A Cessna 152 called for a VFR departure from runway 15 with a left turn northbound. Navy 31 (two F/A-18s) was on a three-mile final with GCA, runway 5, cleared for a low approach.

The Cessna was cleared to take off on runway 15 with a left turnout upon reaching 500 feet. (Normal pattern altitude for category I aircraft is 800 feet).

As the local controller, I watched the F/A-18 flight to ensure safe crossing over runway 5 for the Cessna. Air Force 99 (an A-10) checked in from the east, VFR. As I turned to get a visual on the A-10, he was at what appeared to be lower than normal pattern altitude for category III and in conflict with the Cessna in a wide left turn. At this point, neither pilot was aware that they were about to be head on; both were flying blissfully ignorant of the situation. Not so myself. I suddenly couldn't find official phraseology for "Look out!" This is how it went.

Air Force 99: Tower, AF 99, VFR from the east for a straight-in runway 5.

Tower: AF 99, Tower, altimeter 30.10, traffic departing runway 15 in a wide left turn, light civil at or below 800, just off your right side.

Air Force 99: Tower, 99 is looking.

Tower: AF 99, traffic slightly below to your right. Civil 01, traffic off your nose from the east, A-10, VFR entering right downwind runway 5; does not have you in sight.

Civil 01: Roger, Tower, we're looking for 'em.

Air Force 99: Tower, 99 has the traffic; no factor.

Tower: AF 99, Tower, roger. Civil 01, A-10 has you in sight, continue northbound.

Air Force 99 was then cleared for a short right base and landed.

When I saw how close the two aircraft were to each other, I certainly had respect for the "guts" of those jet jocks. It had looked close from the tower, but the pilot had not felt it was a factor.

Somewhere between the traffic call and the landing, the A-10 pilot changed his mind. He contacted the Air Traffic Control Facility Officer to complain about the proximity of the Cessna. Of course, the ATC officer questioned me about the situation, which caused me some concern. One thing a controller never wants to hear is, "We're pulling the tapes." (All of our radio transmissions are recorded in case of an incident.)

Whether you've done something wrong isn't the point; it's just not conducive to digesting your lunch. We always seem to be responsible in the end, whether it's improper phraseology or even some other situation investigators find while they're searching for the one in question. We're supposed to do it right, first time every time, no excuses.

Once we had played the tapes back along with the radar (DAIR) tape, it became clear that the A-10 pilot had erred by entering the ATA at an unauthorized altitude of approximately 1,000 feet, and did not call the tower prior to entering the ATA. (The facility operations manual specifies that VFR arrivals will be at 2,500 feet and that pilots will call the tower prior to 10 miles out.) This was also a station aircraft and he knew course rules.

Upon review, it came to light that the A-10 had been approximately 300 feet and less than one mile from the Cessna. Whew! I had not enjoyed the view from the tower. It was almost like being Garfield plastered to the tower window screaming, "Watch out!". I knew it had been close, but I really could have done without the actual numbers. For once though, the controller was vindicated! (Okay, so I was counseled about using non-standard phraseology, but that's splitting hairs, isn't it?) ◀

AC2 Hadden is the Facility Watch Supervisor at NAS New Orleans.



Wasn't Anyone Listening?

By LCdr. Steve Ude

Many people say that most midairs happen when the weather is CAVU. I thought I'd never be in that situation, especially since I've left the Navy tactical flying behind as a full-time job and spend most of my flying in the structured, civil-airway system. But as I learned recently, both military and civilian flying are still very much interwoven, which can lead to unexpected meetings.

On this particular day, I had the morning shift to Phoenix and then on to MCAS Yuma/International in our Beechcraft twin-turboprop. The Southwest weather was living up to its reputation on this wintry day: cool crisp temperatures, clear skies, with visibility easily pushing 60 miles.

MCAS Yuma is a bit unusual as it requires all non-jet aircraft that are not on instrument approaches to enter the ATA at 1,200 feet or below. There are

times when just about every variety of flying machines operating in a very confined airspace, trying to use as many as four different and intersecting runways at once. The Marine and civilian controllers earn their money on a regular basis. As a result, the normal traffic flow has military traffic use either 3L or 3R while civilian traffic uses runway 35. If the winds are favorable and the military traffic light, the tower lets civilian operators use runway 8/26 on request to expedite traffic flow.

After listening to ATIS and hearing the winds were light and variable, we requested runway 26 from Approach to save some time and keep ahead of schedule. When we checked in with Tower, they told us to report a two-mile final and to expect runway 26. At three miles we dropped the gear, completed the final landing checklist and then reported

our arrival at the two-mile final.

About this time, the captain, who was flying, noticed a tail-dragger pulling up to the hold-short line for 26. With less than a mile to touchdown, Tower cleared the tail-dragger onto 26 for takeoff, and the other plane promptly complied! By the time the controller realized his mistake, it was too late. The captain waved off. We duly made our waveoff call to Tower and were surprised to hear them call out jet traffic climbing off runway 3R.

Constant bearing, decreasing range is one of the most dreaded calls in the surface community, but it aptly describes our rapidly developing situation. Instead of a 20-knot closure rate, we were climbing out at 150 knots and I can only guess the F/A-18 was doing well above that. Even though the captain was closer to the F/A-18 than I was, he was unable to locate the rapidly approaching jet. Fortunately, I was able to pick it up immediately once Tower called it.

I told the captain to level off and we treated our passengers to a close-up belly view of a loaded F/A-18 as he went over the top of us at 150 feet.

After landing and calming the concerns of several shaken passengers, we called the tower controllers to tell them about our near midair. As a result, the tower now calls out all conflicting traffic and broadcasts on ATIS when they are conducting simultaneous runway operations.

I learned and relearned a few things that day.

Even though it's widely known, remember that the tower is operating on both UHF and VHF frequencies; try to listen up and form a mental picture of all of the players involved.

In our situation, the controller failed to notify us of the F/A-18 using runway 3R until after we had announced our go-around.

Don't padlock on a problem; both the captain and I fixated on runway 26 and the possible conflict with the tail-dragger. We momentarily forgot about the other two active (and intersecting) runways.

The folks involved in this incident were probably

just a little too relaxed coming into the situation. It was a slow time for the tower controller, because he had only four aircraft to deal with instead of the normal 12 or 15. We knew there was jet traffic on 3L, but somehow missed the tower's transmissions to the aircraft on 3R.

As for the tail-dragger pilot, hadn't he been listening to Tower? Didn't he hear our two-mile final call with the gear? If nothing else, he should have looked out his window before taking the runway.

Although the F/A-18 bubba was cleared for a low approach on his runway, I wonder if he was listening to Tower as they cleared another aircraft to land on an intersecting runway? Wasn't he the least bit curious as to where that aircraft might be in relationship to his?

If he had had all the speed and power in the world it wouldn't have any difference; his day would have most certainly been ruined along with ours.

LCdr. Ude flies H-2s with HSL-84. As a civilian, he is an airline pilot.

"It Just Blew"



By Lt. John Manser

I could hear the other JOs' reaction to that explanation ringing in my ears. "Gus" would probably become my new callsign or that of my pilot. Was it our fault or a material failure?

We were four months into cruise and on our last few days in the Arabian Gulf. As a Cat I RIO, I had spent the previous two years making a long transition from the F-14A to the F-14B. However, because this was a combat deployment and my first cruise, I was normally crewed with an experienced lieutenant commander. Then finally, I was trusted to fly with another JO.

This was our second hop together. We had briefed for a day ATO-tasked CAP mission over northern Saudi Arabia and Kuwait flying with a combat loadout. The smoke from the oil fires was not reducing the visibility near the ship yet, so we were blessed with a Case I launch and recovery. (The smoke usually became a factor, forcing Case III procedures and giving me "the leans" in marshal.)

Tension, runup, wipeout, ready, salute. Clunk! Then the reassuring acceleration down the cat to flying speed, rotation and the disconcerting slight settle, positive rate of climb, gear and flaps coming up, clean.

"207, Boss, it looks like you blew a nose tire on the

cat. We'll recover you last on a straight-in."

"207," I replied.

As we climbed away from the water, I looked back at the wings and slats for any signs of damage. Nothing. My pilot confirmed that the flaps, slats and gear were indicating safe up-and-locked and the engines and hydraulics were normal. We reviewed the boldface and PCL procedures and decided to leave everything up for the moment.

Managing fuel was always critical because of the F/A-18s in our air wing and the ever-changing recovery times, so we discussed when we thought we were going to recover. We felt the Boss intended to take us within 30 minutes, last on the recovery following the launch in progress. Therefore, we felt fat on gas and proceeded to low holding.

I checked in on button 7 for a rep and asked if we had a playmate overhead that could give us a visual check. Soon, our squadronmates joined on us and told us we looked OK. Next, we dirtied up and got safe down-and-locked indications. They confirmed that the left nose tire was flat, but everything else looked normal. (There is no definite way on the F-14 to visually confirm that the gear downlocks are engaged.) We thanked them, kissed them off, and remained dirty.

As the recovery progressed, we left holding and headed aft to set up for our straight-in. We reviewed the PCL and felt confident that if we bolted, our F110-GE-400 engines could get us airborne again.

We started dumping to get to max trap. I tried to guess when to check in by observing the deck with the TCS.

"Wait a minute!" I said. "There's an F-14 and tow tractor on the fantail. Respot! They've forgotten about us!"

"Boss, 207 checking in at 10 miles for the straight-in," I tried to call calmly.

"207! What did I tell you?" the Boss snarled.

What followed next was some enjoyable explanations first by me, then by my pilot, to the Boss and captain of the ship. I was waiting for the rest of the heavies on board to take their turn checking our story and chewing us out. The Boss had intended for us to recover last at our briefed time in over an hour. After I 'fessed up our state, the Mini-Boss calmly told us to "Delta easy. We're making a ready deck."

Five minutes later we trapped, blowing our other nose tire under the added weight. We were thankful to be back

safe. Fortunately, everyone understood our decision-making and there was no retribution. Nine days later we got to blow both nose tires again! Our sister squadron was having even more nose tire failures, so we suspected that the cause was a material or storage problem.

In retrospect, I should have verified our recovery instructions with the Boss directly or through our rep on button 7. By the time we knew we had blown a tire, we were clean and had already violated step 2 of the bold-face. When would you dirty up? Always save your gas until the last possible time to dump.

Recently, I did some scenario training during a safety standdown and changed the blown nose tire to a main tire and had the visual check crew see a hyperextended strut with streaming fluid. This version let us discuss the hydraulic-isolate switch and get into the gear-malfunction table for divert or barricade options.

New aircrew members seem to get a lot out of the scenarios when the emphasis is on discussion rather than the right or wrong actions by those in the hot seats. ◀

Lt. Manser is a RIO with VF-24.

Technically, We Didn't Follow NATOPS

By Lt. Scott McPherson

In support of Operation Southern Watch, our squadron had been flying a demanding flight schedule. Today, I was scheduled to fly with my secondary (nugget) pilot on a SSC/ASR mission around the Persian Gulf. Since we hadn't flown together in a while we had an extra thorough brief

It was a beautiful case I day and the jet was performing flawlessly. As Dash 2 of our section, we broke 17 seconds after our lead and began our dirty up. In the break, my pilot's ICS became intermittent and I was only hearing about every third word. No big deal. The A-6's side-by-side seating makes hand signals very easy, and we were both convinced we had completed the landing checklist.

At the 180, I heard my cohort say, "Y...we a fire...t."

What? I wasn't sure what he said, but I knew I wasn't going to like it. He pointed to the left fire light as he took his mask off to talk to me. My first thought was to continue and land. I knew my pilot was thinking the same thing. In the next few seconds, we covered getting the gang bar off, checking the bleed-air circuit breaker and pushing the fire light. A quick check for secondaries showed nothing abnormal.

"Boss, this is 411," I called. "At the 180, left fire light, we want to land now."

"Roger 411, you are cleared. We don't see any

indications from here." We continued to a normal trap. On landing, we immediately shut down the left engine as the yellow-shirt ran up and signalled to cut the right engine.

"They want us to cut the right engine," my pilot said.

"Shake your head no."

"He still says to cut it."

"Maybe there's really a fire under there. Shut it down."

Great. Now we were stiff wing in the landing area; and before the Boss could call us to clear up the confusion, the aircraft power cut off. We were towed out of the way and when the Boss called our ready room, we were relieved to be exonerated of fault at the mix up in the landing area.

At the next AOM, we told our story. From the back of the room someone said "Technically, you guys didn't follow NATOPS." Technically, he was right; but let's look at the options. A strict compliance with NATOPS would have called for a climb overhead as we secured the engine and set up for a single-engine approach. Ugh!

If the fire light would have come on anywhere else he probably would have been right, but at the 180, ready to come aboard, with no secondary indications, common sense dictated a normal landing without putting ourselves in danger and landing single-engine. ◀

Lt. McPherson is a BN with VA-155.

The Case of the Mystery Spark

By Lt. Gary Kohorst



PH1 William A. Shayka

We had been flying two missions a day for two weeks as part of COMPTUEX, but today's mission was a little different. We were launching on the last cycle of the day to give a visiting AWACS officer a look at carrier ops.

I sat in the forward seat, with our visitor in the middle seat. He could watch me and the CICO, sitting in the third seat, at work.

I finished my systems checks and briefed our guest on the system. He was complaining about his survival gear in the cramped quarters. I jokingly told him that it was all necessary and that he would appreciate it in the water.

"With more than 31 miles of wiring in the plane," I explained, fires are not uncommon. You might go swimming tonight." He wasn't amused, but then again, neither was I.

The pilots started up. We taxied to the cat and went into tension. Our CICO pulled the ditching hatch and we

were ready to go. I braced myself for the jolt. Bam! We were off! My head was still slammed against the seat as we hit the end of the track.

At that moment, I saw a bright light out of the corner of my eye. It seemed to come from the main power-distribution panel (MPDP) down by my right knee. As soon as I could, I looked for the spark's source. I couldn't find anything but shut the radar down anyway. I told the CICO; he agreed and called the pilots.

After close examination I couldn't find any secondaries, and there was no evidence that there had ever been a spark. After five minutes of searching and a lot of talk, we decided to call the ship. The CICO talked to our rep, and we all agreed that we should recover right away.

Great! We would miss the mission in an important phase of the exercise, and get the ship spooled up over something that I couldn't prove existed. I could see myself standing in front of the skipper explaining why the

junior guy busted a hop, didn't need an eye exam, and didn't make up a story to recover early.

For the next 15 minutes, I looked for proof and thought about jumping from the plane before recovery to avoid grief from my fellows JOs or worse, the chiefs, over the "mystery spark."

After we trapped, I debriefed the flight-deck maintenance chief and AE on what I had seen. When I entered the ready room, I met the CO and XO. With more than 7,000 hours between them, neither one had heard of the situation I told them about. Did I blow the call! No—maintenance called; I wasn't wrong!

They had pulled the MPDP apart and found the main electrical wire bundle had arced. My spark was the arcing bundle burning a small hole through the metal cover of the MPDP. By shutting down the system I may have prevented further arcing. I wouldn't have seen any other indications without pulling apart the MPDP. The hole was small enough to look like a missing screw hole. I thought it belonged there.

I was glad to hear that I wasn't seeing things and had been right. I was a little unnerved to find how close I had come to fighting a major inflight fire. I will never again be afraid to make the call just because I'm the junior guy. ◀

Lt. Kohorst flies with VAW-124.

Preflight

By LCdr. William Clark

We had just taxied to the cat when I looked out and spotted my flight-deck chief emerging from under the nosewheel area giving a big thumbs down to the shooter.

"This stinks," I said to my pilot. "We have been manning jets for two days and can't seem to get airborne." At the time, I was ready to blame maintenance (once again) for not providing an up and ready jet.

We taxied off the cat to let the maintenance troops work on the aircraft. Still not knowing what we were down for, we cracked the canopy and asked for the flight-deck chief. He climbed the boarding ladder and started apologizing profusely. He said that the final checkers found a loose hydraulic-line clamp on the nose strut.

I thought, "Why didn't they catch that before we manned up?" The troops continued working the problem and within minutes we were up and ready, but it was too late; the recovery was underway.

"Now this really stinks," I said. For the next 40 minutes, we watched the recovery and waited to be stuffed.

After we shut down and climbed out, I asked the chief to point out the problem. He took us to the nosewheel area, and pointed to the nosegear drag brace and a "C" clamp that holds a hydraulic line in place. He said that the screw which holds the clamp in place had worked loose, to the point of falling out in his hand.

I was just about to ask the chief why they did not catch it before we manned up when I realized that I did not catch it on preflight. You'd figure that after logging over 2,000 hours in an aircraft, one would certainly know all there is to know about preflight inspections.

I sat down in the ready room, pulled out the PCL, and reviewed the preflight inspection checklist. Do you know



Peter Mersky

that there are over 130 preflight items listed for the A-6? I went through every one of them and, quite frankly, was shocked at how many items I had never inspected or items I used to inspect but had not inspected in recent memory.

Maybe it's time for you to sit down and review your aircraft's preflight checklist. ◀

LCdr. Clark is a BN with VA-52



LCdr. Welch

Back in the Saddle?

By Lt. Dave Lobdell

My first flight in three to four weeks and I was really looking forward to a back-in-the-saddle flight and FCLP before an upcoming at-sea period.

After completing the preflight checks, we called for takeoff and were soon roaring through the sky in Zone-5 afterburner. I was hanging on to the rudders not trying to stay ahead of the airplane, but just get even with it. Oops, I overshot the level-off altitude by 100 feet. The airplane was clean, the engines looked good, and the fuel was transferring nicely. I was even nailing the airspeed to within a knot on the

departure. This wasn't so hard after all.

Soon I was in the warning area and amazed that I could hold 350 KIAS while only using about 3,000 pounds per side of fuel at 27,000 feet.

"Turning in," I called. I went to military power, started to put some G on the jet and noted I was pulling 15 units AOA. The airplane responded with heavy buffet and began descending at a good rate under only 2 Gs. Something was not quite right.

My RIO said, "Hey, it's nice you're thinking about gas but we

don't have to do this intercept at max conserve." It all came together as I asked him what he was indicating for airspeed.

"210 knots," he said.

I leveled my wings as we compared indicators. I was showing 350 KIAS while he had 220 KIAS. I accelerated to 250 KIAS on his gauge while our wingman joined up to cross-check our airspeeds. My indicator was reading 80-100 knots fast. Based on that, we decided to head back and bypass the FCLP pattern. It was then my RIO added that he had wondered why I was flying the departure a little slow.

I chose to return to base to get maintenance working on the problems immediately. I told my RIO that I was going to dump some fuel. After four cycles of the dump switch, I told him that the dumps weren't coming on. He suggested cycling the speed brake switch because it has an electrical interlock to the dump valve in the F-14. After numerous combinations of cycling the speed brakes and the dump switch, I was finally rewarded with fuel pouring out the dump mast. Four thousand pounds later, I told my RIO that I was securing the dumps.

I watched with amazement as the totalizer kept clicking down. Our wingman confirmed that I was still dumping. My RIO pulled out the pocket checklist as I sat there vainly cycling the dump switch "on" and "off" in an attempt to stop the flow.

Now what was the number of that circuit breaker that controls the fuel

dump? "It's on the right side," I said to myself, as I tried to read the C/B panel label in the fading light.

"It's ... um ... It's ... um ..."

A thousand pounds of fuel later, my RIO said, "Have you tried pulling the RD1 circuit breaker?"

That was the circuit breaker I couldn't recall. With the circuit breaker pulled, fuel flow stopped, leaving us with about 6,500 pounds of usable fuel. After one section GCA I was safely on deck. Maintenance found a crimped pitot static line in the front cockpit, which had caused the erroneous airspeed indications. A sticky valve had kept me from securing fuel dumps.

During a very thorough debrief, my RIO and I discussed that although we had briefed everything to get our rusty flying skills up to speed, we had done little to enhance our rusty crew coordination. If he had spoken up on the departure when he saw something was out of the ordinary with my airspeed, we could have caught it then instead of coming close to a stall and departure at 27,000 feet.

If I had spoken up sooner about the location of the circuit breaker, instead of trying to preserve my ego, I would have saved 1,000 pounds of gas.

That night there were two skilled individuals in that jet instead of a skilled crew. With the kind of equipment that we fly, that is simply unacceptable. Crew-coordination skills deteriorate almost as fast as ball-flying skills. ◀

Lt. Lobdell flies with VF-111.

BRAVO ZULU



Left to right: Lt. Ronald L. Lotz, Lt. Kara S. Hultgreen

Lt. Kara S. Hultgreen
Lt. Ronald L. Lotz
VAQ-33

Arriving at NAS Pensacola following a ferry flight, Lt. Hultgreen (pilot) and Lt. Lotz (ECMO) entered the break. They dirtied up, but their EA-6A's right main landing gear did not extend. Following NATOPS, the crew climbed over the field, cycled the gear several times and applied positive and negative Gs to extend the mainmount, to no avail. Finally, they decided to use the blow-down system to no avail.

Lt. Hultgreen made an arrested landing on the left main gear and nose gear, adding a burst of power as the Intruder touched down to ensure that the right wing did not settle before the hook engaged the wire. It is impossible to hold the wing up aerodynamically using the flaperon system for roll control.

The aircraft stopped on the run-

way with slight damage to the outboard flap and wingtip, but less than a class-C mishap.

The forward main-gear door was jammed into the fuselage, preventing it from opening. ◀

Capt. David E. Phillips, USMC
2ndLt. David J. Barnes, USMC
VT-3

Capt. Phillips (IP) and 2ndLt. Barnes (SNA) were returning to NAS Whiting Field North from a FAM 3 training flight. When 2ndLt. Barnes lowered the gear handle in the break procedures, the crew saw an unsafe-gear indication for the right main gear. Capt. Phillips took control of the T-34C and flew an emergency orbit pattern to complete emergency procedures and get a visual inspection from another T-34.

Lt. Joseph C. Blake was in the

area and joined on the first trainer. He reported that the other T-34's right mainmount was inside the wheel well with the doors closed. Emergency procedures to extend the gear didn't work.

Capt. Phillips called the squadron flight duty officer and maintenance. He then decided to set up for a controlled gear-up landing at Whiting Field South.

After orbiting to burn down fuel and to review emergency landing procedures, the IP made several practice approaches with the canopy open. When coming in for the final landing, Capt. Phillips told 2ndLt. Barnes to secure the engine with the condition lever and emergency fuel-shutoff handle when they were over the approach end of the runway. Capt. Phillips then landed on centerline, stopping just to the right of the crash vehicles with no injuries and minimal aircraft damage.

Inspection showed that the actuator rod for the right inboard gear door had failed, trapping the mainmount inside the wheel well. ◀



Left to right: 2ndLt. David J. Barnes, USMC; Capt. David E. Phillips, USMC



1stLt. Kevin Harmon, USMC
VMA-513

Climbing out of NAS Miramar, en route to Luke AFB, the flight of four leveled off at FL 340. Approximately 10 minutes after reaching altitude, 1stLt. Harmon, Dash 4, felt an explosion, followed by cold and wind in the cockpit of his AV-8B. His canopy had exploded, left the aircraft and FODed the engine.

Responding to the rapid decompression, he lowered his seat, stowed all loose gear, and began slowing down as he advised his section leader of the situation.

The section leader, Maj. Jon Davis, detached their section and coordinated with Center for immediate clearance to the nearest divert, MCAS Yuma. Maj. Davis also called base to alert the squadron that the two Harriers were inbound with an emergency.

Setting 80 percent power to avoid any unnecessary changes to the FODed engine, 1stLt. Harmon decided to make a variable-nozzle-fixed-throttle approach.

With only 135 hours in type, he landed under extremely difficult circumstances with what subsequent investigation revealed was a severely damaged engine. ◀

LCdr. Robert Schrader
Lt. Pete Ulrich
VF-14

Camelot 102 and Camelot 104 had just completed a bombing-strafting hop. After rendezvous, the crews made clean-and-dry checks before turning toward the carrier, USS *John F. Kennedy* (CV 67). During the checks, the crew of Camelot 102, Lt. Van Boudreau (pilot) and Lt. Sean Wall (RIO), noticed a horizontal crack on Camelot 104 that ran the entire width of the F-14's left rudder just above the middle attach point. The upper half of the rudder was attached only at the upper point and was separating from the vertical stabilizer.

Camelot 104's crew, Lt. Ulrich (pilot) and LCdr. Schrader (RIO), saw no abnormal cockpit indications. They decided to return to the ship at 250 knots and make a straight-in approach. During the return flight, 102's crew saw hydraulic fluid, which appeared to come from the base of 104's port vertical stabilizer. The F-14s dirtied up. Lt. Ulrich did not have any control problems or see any abnormal indications for the hydraulics. Lt. Ulrich and LCdr. Schrader trapped without further incident.

While trying to taxi clear of the wires with NWS engaged, Lt. Ulrich noticed some initial stiffness, then large hydraulic fluctuations accompanied by the kicking of the rudders. The Air Boss also said that

he saw smoke and possibly a fire in or on the left engine. The crew immediately shut down both engines. Inspection revealed that the smoke came from hydraulic fluid leaking from the rudder onto the afterburner can.

An engineering investigation is underway to determine why the rudder failed. ◀



Left to right: LCdr. Robert Schrader, Lt. Pete Ulrich





Inside, When We Should Have Been Outside!

By Ltjg. Scott McKenzie

Clear skies, calm winds, and plenty of up jets. We were halfway through our FRS visual weapons detachment and I had progressed to the tactics hops. Did you say four-plane battle-box formation on a low-level to the target area with 12 Mk-76s? Popup deliveries? Forty-degree dives? And you pay me to do this?

The flying was aggressive and also different from anything I'd done before. Let's face it; a tour as a T-2 SERGRAD instructor doesn't prepare you to be tactical. Having more than 1,000 hours improved my air sense and confidence, though, and helped me perform well and handle most any situation—I thought.

We briefed as a division and then split up into sections. When it came time to do crew briefs we barely had time to cover abort criteria. Any questions? Ready, break!

We started up, launched, joined up and proceeded to point alpha. We descended to 200 feet, did some tac-turns, and hung a left at Picacho Peak. Everything was clicking—on target, on time, then into the low pattern. I remember thinking that this was the best flight of my naval career.

"803 is off safe, going to the high pattern," I called, and we climbed to 12,000 feet. Here is where things started to go sour. As I pulled the nose down to the target for my first run, I noticed a click in my headset and a flashing master caution. I looked down and saw the annunciator panel confirming a failed generator.

"I'm aborting," I said and started my pull up.

"What are you doing?" my instructor said. "It's just a

generator! Keep going!" But it was too late to salvage the run.

"803's going around high," I radioed.

As I tried to reset the generator, my instructor explained that single-generator ops were not uncommon in the Intruder. Numerous reset attempts were unsuccessful.

"OK, time to get back in the pattern. I think that's my interval up ahead... OK, we're at the roll-in point, here I...damn!"

Just 500 feet ahead of me was another A-6 that had just started its roll-in. I quickly reversed my turn to avoid hitting him. Neither I nor my instructor had seen him.

We learned some hard lessons. First, go into the brief with a critiqued plan of action for any possible malfunction. Talk to the old guys; they've probably been there and done that. Second, always allow enough time for an unhurried brief.

Third, don't allow minor problems to distract you from the overall big picture. If I lost a generator today, I wouldn't abort the run, but if I did, I'd be sure to keep my interval in sight as I tried to reset it. Save the debrief for the debrief. My instructor should have been looking outside for aircraft instead of inside discussing the history of generator problems in the A-6.

Ltjg. McKenzie flies with VA-95.

Even instructors are expected to follow proper aircrew coordination procedures.—LCdr. Dave Adamson, Naval Safety Center A-6 analyst.

A Summer's Day at the Local Pool



By LCdr. Steve Ude

After a tour in Hawaii, I checked into North Island for aviation physiology training and swim requalification. My 9D5 requalification class consisted of mostly "blackshoe" staffers, and one SEAL type. Since only the SEAL and I had to perform the infamous blindfold escape, we instantly became the "A" crew. The others watched with envy as we showed them how seasoned veterans performed.

On the second ride of the afternoon (the first blindfold ride), I was in the right front seat silently suffering all of the dread, anxiety and trepidation associated with this particular E-ticket ride. After all, what sane, rational person would willingly strap himself blindfolded into a tube of steel, be immersed upside-down in a tank of water waiting for water to come up his nose, and then try to find his way out by feel? Well, Houdini did (and got paid lots of money for it) but he died young.

Most of you know the drill: Wait till the water covers your head, count to 10 or until the water comes up your nose, find your reference point, unhook the seat belt, turn to the nearest exit while maintaining your reference, grasp both sides of the outer hull and pull firmly, exhale while you rise to the surface and hope the diver doesn't say you released too soon. Piece of cake.

On this particular ride I achieved step four before things began to go awry. With my left hand on the reference point, I quickly unhooked the seat belt and then reached out to grasp what served as the window. When I turned in my seat to leave, I was rather rudely stopped by the seat belt at about three to four inches of travel. Sitting back down I reached to find the right half of the seat belt dangling free, but my SV-2 leg strap was somehow jammed in the left half of the seat belt. After feeling around a bit and tugging at the belt several times, I had the dawning realization that it wasn't coming free.

Now all of those hours of highly specialized Navy training kicked in. I simply reached into my vest to use my HEED bottle, only...no bottle! I then fell back on my privately funded scuba diving training and reached out to where I thought was the window, waved my arm and gave the buddy-in-distress signal as well as I needed to share the buddy store mouthpiece (Octopus fitting) that all sport divers carry.

It seemed like forever before the safety diver finally showed up. I felt his hand pull on my shoulder, and I pointed to the seatbelt wondering why he wasn't handing me a mouthpiece for oxygen.

He started to pull on the jam and I found myself hanging upside down, with water trying to come up my nose as the diver alternated between pulling harder and trying different angles to unjam the SV-2 from the seatbelt. I was amazed both at how calm I was, (after all I knew the diver would solve the problem) and yet laughing at myself about drowning during a training exercise which was suppose to teach me how not to drown.

After what seemed like a couple of minutes, but was probably 30 seconds or so, the diver freed me and I floated to the surface. Once out of the tank, I discovered a few things and then gave the whole situation some thought over the next few days.

Since we're trained on HEED bottles, I wonder why we don't carry them, and maybe even given a chance to use them to escape from the 9D5 under supervision. Although, the divers had nice equipment, they really ought to carry an octopus fitting. If the diver in my case hadn't cleared the seatbelt, I may have started to panic as the air inside the old lungs got thin. A buddy store would keep the students calm and lucid should a situation like this recur.

The instructors and I failed to debrief the incident, thus denying future classes and instructors from developing either a plan or learning from the experience.

Finally—and this didn't occur to me until several days later—throughout the entire episode, I never took off the blackout goggles! (Pretty dumb, huh?) Yet, I received a wealth of information strictly through feel and touch. I was so immersed in the training scenario, that I stayed in the role throughout. I do firmly believe in the 9D5 trainer, corroded seat belts and all. It is a realistic trainer and as much as I cringe when I say it, the blindfold scenario is accurate and instructive.

LCdr. Ude flies with HSL-84.

2 Individuals, *Not a Crew of Two*

Peter Mersky



By Cdr. Gary R. Jones

My first month as XO flashed by. After three years in Washington, D.C., I was more than ready to join a squadron again. What amazed me most was the amount of paperwork and number of meetings I had to embrace. I thought I had left all that inside the beltway. My vision of max flight time took a back seat to PODs, zone inspections and department-head meetings. In six weeks, I logged a whopping 3.6 hours in the air.

I knew I needed to fly, so when the SDO was looking for a copilot to complete the crew for an unscheduled FCF, I happily told him I would do it. The HAC/FCP was one of the squadron's real go-getters with lots of flight time and several long cruises. It was just what I needed—flight time, a check flight to show the troops that the new XO was a hacker, and a seasoned HAC to keep us out of trouble.

Weather would be a factor. There was a 2,000-foot overcast and three miles visibility in light rain. During the brief, we discussed the need to have 1,500 feet to shoot the maintenance autorotation. Maintenance Control told us that the aircraft had only 1,800 pounds of fuel, just enough for the hover checks and the autos. We would need a hot-pit to complete the inflight portion of the check flight.

A quick check of the sky showed that the weather seemed to be worse than briefed. All of the hover checks were fine, so we set up for the auto. We were having a tough time maintaining VMC at 1,000 feet in the heliport pattern. I was starting to get a little nervous, and I had doubts about whether we should finish the auto. The inflight portion was almost certainly out of the question. I was really glad to have an experienced FCP beside me.

Before I realized it, the HAC had climbed to 1,500 feet on downwind, had done his best to keep the ground in sight in and out of the clouds, and had set us up for the auto. I tried to catch up with him in the cockpit (those three years in Washington were really showing) as we entered the auto. It was in limits, so we cleaned up the cockpit, turned downwind, and in anticipation of our final landing, I got on the No.2 radio to tell Maintenance Control of our accomplishments.

To my astonishment, the HAC was on the other radio requesting special VFR clearance out of the traffic area. In my best I'm-the-XO-what's-going-on voice, I asked what was his plan. He told me not to worry, we could stay VFR under the overcast, complete the inflight portion en route to the hot pits at a neighboring NAS, and be able to return to homeplate with an up aircraft. We had not covered

going through the hot pits at the other base during the brief, and I was becoming very nervous with the entire situation.


I checked our fuel state and was about to say that I wasn't happy with it when I heard the HAC in the midst of a heated exchange with Approach. Approach wanted us to head farther offshore to avoid IFR traffic on final to the international airport between us and the other NAS. The situation was turning ugly. I told the HAC to comply with Approach's directions and head out to sea. As we turned out into the bay and lost sight of the coastline in marginal weather, I got very upset with myself for letting things get out of control.

We were now past the halfway point between homeplate and the NAS hot pits. I was even more concerned about our fuel. I called ahead to get the weather at the NAS—it was VFR, but forecast to become IFR within the hour—and wondered how I was going to explain the incident with ATC and the rest of this situation to the skipper.

The ceiling and visibility were falling as we rolled into the hot pits, and I was now very nervous. What I had expected to be a simple functional check flight with an experienced FCP had turned into a comedy of errors, but I wasn't laughing.

OK, enough was enough. I told the FCP that I would fly the leg home. We asked for special VFR clearance out of the pits and for the overland departure route to keep us clear of the international airport. No need to chance another discussion with Approach.

As I lifted into a hover, I immediately noticed that the visibility was less than three miles. Passing 600 feet, we entered solid IMC. I had had enough, and I called time out. We descended, regained VMC, and asked permission to land back at the air station. We taxied to the transient line and shut down. I called the squadron to let them know we were OK, then I had a long debrief with the FCP. Then we filed an IFR flight plan direct home and returned safely.

Experience is no insurance against stupidity. If in doubt, there is no doubt—stop what you are doing. I knew what we were doing as a crew was stupid, but as the copilot, I failed to do my job. During the debrief, the FCP confessed that he felt pressure to complete the FCF and thus show me a can-do attitude. He also admitted that he was getting concerned about the situations we were in. An experienced FCP and a copilot with more than 2,000 hours—on paper a safe crew, but in the air, a couple of individuals who did a lot of dumb things. We obviously didn't act like a crew. 

Cdr. Jones is the CO of HSL-34.



I'll See Your Commander, and Raise You Two Lieutenants

By Lt. Billie G. Dunlap

I was a first-tour RIO with less than 12 months in the squadron. I was looking forward to those last few traps I needed for my Centurion patch. My pilot was a nugget out for his first look at fleet carrier ops and his first traps in the F-14B. Having recently completed a Westpac deployment including combat operations over Iraq and the North Arabian Gulf, I considered my weather experience rather complete. What we were about to face would be new to me.

We took off from Miramar as part of a four-plane CQ/BAGEX. Mother was 350 miles away in questionable weather with several excellent divert fields within 100 miles. No problem for a Tomcat, even without drop tanks.

Eighty miles away at 25,000 feet, we checked in with Strike. There was a heavy broken layer at what appeared to be 2,000 feet. At 50 miles we checked in with Marshal with the edge of the low layer in sight, hoping it was less than 50 miles away.

At 32 miles, my pilot spotted the ship outside the layer just as we switched to Tower and were told to charlie on arrival. We detached from our lead (an airborne spare) and set up to enter the break having checked and re-checked our pre-landing and descent checklists.

As we approached the initial, we realized two things: the ship was a lot closer to the layer than we had thought and the layer was much lower than 2,000 feet.

We passed overhead the ship just as it went under the layer and broke at 2.5 miles to give us plenty of time to set up for the approach. In the break, we were in and out of the clouds but were too busy getting the airplane configured to notice we couldn't see the ship. We rolled out on a good abeam distance 45 degrees off the ship by the TACAN and held the recip heading—we thought. Our heading was actually a 10-degree cut into the ship! Because of the Tomcat's poor underwater flight characteristics, I monitored our altitude very closely as we continued in and out of the clouds at 600 feet, still looking for the ship.

My pilot completed the landing checklist and called "left to left" on the ICS as the TACAN said we were abeam at 0.7 miles! One potato later we broke out and spotted the ship as we started the turn.

My nugget pilot showed a lot of "fleet maturity" by biting off on the big overshoot with a wave-off in the middle instead of making a dangerous play for the deck to look good on his first trap in the squadron. The ship miraculously found a hole and we came back around to

land on the 1-wire, never losing sight of the ship. We sat on the deck for 40 minutes for a hot pump as the ship turned to find clear sky again, which gave us plenty of time to talk about what had happened. Then we launched back into the pattern.

There are several things that we didn't consider that could have made this event go smoother. Instead of pressing the landing, we should have called "popeye" and got out of Dodge instead of chancing unbriefed 1 v 1 with the ship or another aircraft at the hard deck. I realized how much I had always relied on visual cues to judge abeam distance, and now I keep a much closer watch on the digital DME counter of my ECMD. And finally, the Boss's call to "charlie" is not a lawful order that we are obligated to obey. Two junior lieutenants in a jet over the ocean outrank a commander sitting in a warm cozy chair on the O-10 level—sometimes. We had plenty gas and were in no particular hurry.

I got that hundredth trap and proudly wear my Centurio patch, and am much the wiser for it.

LT. Dunlap was flying with VF-24 at the time of this story.

Vultures' Row

This list includes Flight, Flight Related and Ground Class A Mishaps as of 25Apr93.
Classifications and descriptions are subject to change.

DATE	PLATFORM	COMMAND	DAY; NIGHT	FATAL	FLIGHT REGIME; LOCATION
1 Oct	F/A-18B	NATC PAX	D	1 Civ	Approach wave-off; Pax River, MD
4 Oct	AH-1W	HMM-365	D	1	Hot-refueling; at sea
13 Oct	HH-1N	VXE-6	D	3 (2 Civ)	En route; Antarctica
16 Oct	F-14A	VF-302	D	0	ACM; Key West; FL
20 Oct	CH-46E	HMM-262	N	0	Night taxi attempted takeoff; MCAS Futenma, Okinawa
28 Oct	A-4M	FIT WEPS School	D	0	Simulated strike; 45nm from Yuma, AZ
1 Nov	F/A-18D	VMFA (AW)-225	D	0	High-speed abort; 29 Palms, AZ
3 Nov	EA-6B	VAQ-129	D	3	Takeoff; El Centro, CA
4 Nov	CH-53E	HMM-261	N	5	NVG ship ops; at sea
8 Nov	CH-46D	HC-11	D	0	Vertrep; at sea
22 Nov	F/A-18A	VFA-97	N	0	Night catapult; at sea
25 Nov	T-2C	VT-23	D	0	Single-engine approach; Kingsville, TX
9 Dec	AV-8B	VMA-214	D	0	En route; Yuma Range, AZ
15 Dec	F-14A	VF-33	D	0	ACM; Oceana Op Area
17 Dec	F-16N	VF-126	D	1	Climb out; Salt Lake City, UT
22 Dec	LC-130F	VXE-6	D	0	Landing; Antarctica
23 Dec	F-14A	VF-201	D	1	ACM; Dallas, TX
18 Jan	F-14A	VF-101	D	0	ACM; Key West, FL
25 Jan	F-14A	VF-24	N	0	FCLP; NAS Miramar, CA
13 Feb	CH-53D	HMH-363	N	0	Unaided external lifts; Somalia
15 Mar	F-14B	VF-101	D	2	Pilot fam; N. Carolina Coast
21 Mar	SH-2F	HSL-37	N	3	SSC; at sea
22 Mar	A-6E	VA-85	N	0	Takeoff; Fallon, NV
22 Mar	CH-53D	HMH-463	D	0	PMFCF; MCAS Kanehoe, HI
26 Mar	E-2C	VAW-124	N	5	Foul-deck waveoff; at sea
13 Apr	F-14D	VF-11	N	0	FCLP; San Clemente Is.
14 Apr	A-6E	VA-95	D	0	Mid-air collision low-level; 40nm S. Spokane, WA
14 Apr	SH-2F	HSL-32	D	0	ASW; at sea
21 Apr	A-6E	VA-34	N	2	Rdvz, mid-air; Nellis Range
23 Apr	SH-2F	HSL-33	D	0	Landing; Bakersfield, CA

WHAT DO YOU MEAN
YOU ASSUMED I KNEW?!!

**Crew Coordination
means
Open Communication**



